

Northern Region Expands Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Efforts

The water rich northern region of Wisconsin, known for its natural, "northwoods" flavor, is increasingly threatened by aquatic invasive species in its lakes, rivers and streams. Presently, 94% of the lakes are still invasive free but each year more lakes and waterbodies are added to the infestation list.

Recognizing that the "North" is in need of a more protective method of management than focusing solely on treatment of infestations, the DNR is continuing to expand its public awareness campaign.

Watercraft Inspections: Creating a climate of cooperation with lake groups and local and county governments, DNR and UWEX staff were busy educating volunteers at Clean Boat - Clean Water workshops. The goal of this program is to teach and instill a consistent message statewide. The Clean Boats- Clean Waters program, in conjunction with grant funding, is resulting in the recruitment of a volunteer network which continues to grow each year. The coordination between the volunteer associations and agencies is expanding the knowledge of AIS issues to the general public, which uses our public waters.

Volunteers across the northwoods have implemented successful watercraft inspection programs inspecting hundreds of boats and recreational equipment at the boat landings. Northern region staff *and hired* watercraft inspectors inspected 10,111 boats and contacted 16,036 individuals



Angler Education: Tournament anglers saw one Rhinelander DNR watercraft inspector, Lori Regni, at most of their events. Reaching 7900 participants, Lori worked with 39 tournament organizers, setting up displays, supplying handouts, speaking to the anglers in addition to inspecting boats and equipment. Because winter ice fishing tournaments are also a concern for invasive species, AIS information materials were distributed to tournament organizers.



Braving the cold February winds, Rhinelander DNR watercraft inspector, Lori Regni coordinated an educational display on AIS with the Pelican Lake Property Owners Association during the largest icefishing tournament in the state. Regni spoke to the 2200 participants on the dangers of dumping leftover bait into the icefishing holes and the crew interviewed anglers during the tournament on their knowledge of AIS. No, that is not a state vehicle on the ice!

Sign Posting:

For the past three years DNR watercraft inspectors have posted AIS informational signs at public boat landings on infested waters. Two signs, a yellow advisory sign indicating which species are present in the waters and a red stop sign to remind boaters to clean their boats, are installed at key locations at the boat landings. Additionally, uninfested waters will also have a red stop sign and a green and white sign to encourage proper boat cleaning techniques. The public has been encouraged to assist the DNR in posting signs at the boat landings. The DNR service centers are receiving many requests from private landings to install the signs.



Lake Monitoring:

Input from DNR fisheries biologists, fishery crews, lake management specialists and technicians helped form a cooperative effort in monitoring area waters for AIS. Zebra mussels, waterfleas and rusty crayfish are the three species the DNR is tracking to determine population distribution. Several waterbodies were chosen for zebra mussel and waterflea monitoring and all 204 samples yielded negative results. Eleven waterbodies were added to the Eurasian water- milfoil infestation list in the northern region in 2005. Finding infestations in the early stages is important in the management of invasive species.



Scott Van Egeren, DNR aquatic plant specialist measuring plant density and looking for suspect aquatic invasive species in an area lake.

AIS Grant Funding: Staff assisted the public in preparing grant applications for both AIS grants and Lake Planning and Protection grants. Having the staff work closely with the public when preparing grants, produced more detailed and effective project scopes. AIS grants allow many groups to implement a Clean Boat-Clean Waters watercraft inspection program, assist counties in educating residents, and fund Eurasian water-milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed control measures. The February 1, 2006 grant cycle received 15 AIS grant applications of which 13 were funded with \$304,441.00 as the state share match.

Current News: The fishing opener is nearly upon us as of this writing and the NOR is busy training new staff, readying equipment, coordinating lake monitoring, and assisting with the 2006 Clean Boats, Clean Waters workshops.